

Frequently Asked Questions

Emergency Rule to Establish Recreational Closure Authority in Federal Waters off Individual States for Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico

What will the emergency rule do?

- The rule will give NOAA Fisheries the authority to set separate closure dates for the recreational red snapper season in federal waters off individual Gulf states.
- Different closure dates could be set for each state based on whether state regulations are consistent with federal regulations for the recreational red snapper season length and 2-fish per person bag limit.

What will the federal recreational red snapper season be given the emergency rule?

- For all federal waters, the season begins June 1, 2013.
- If Texas, Louisiana and Florida finalize their proposed regulations for state waters for the 2013 fishing season, then the emergency rule would authorize the following:
 - In federal and state waters off Mississippi and Alabama, the season would be 28 days long.
 - In federal waters off Texas, the season would be 12 days long.
 - In federal waters off Louisiana, the season would be 9 days long.
 - In federal waters off Florida, the season would be 21 days long.

What would the season be without the emergency rule?

- If we did not implement the emergency rule, then the federal season would be just 22 days Gulf-wide.

Why is the emergency rule necessary?

- NOAA Fisheries is responsible for ensuring the entire recreational harvest does not exceed the recreational quota, including harvest in state waters.
- Therefore, if states establish a longer season or a larger bag limit for state waters than the federal regulations allow in federal waters, the federal season must be adjusted to account for the additional expected harvest.
- Fishermen and associated businesses in states that have regulations consistent with federal regulations get penalized for red snapper harvest that occurs in waters with regulations that are less restrictive than federal regulations.
- The authority granted through this emergency rule will help NOAA Fisheries to constrain recreational red snapper harvest to the catch limit while ensuring fishing opportunities are equitably distributed.

How is the red snapper season length calculated?

- NOAA Fisheries determines the recreational fishing season length based on landings projections, which evaluate catch rates and average weight of red snapper landed in previous years.
- The season is designed to provide fishermen the greatest opportunity to maximize catches without exceeding their annual catch limit.
- For more details, please see the document at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/red_snapper/documents/pdfs/2013_red_snapper_emergency_regs.pdf

Why does the season length for red snapper keep getting shorter when fishermen are seeing more fish?

- There are more red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico today than there have been in decades. This is a sign that the rebuilding plan that began in 2007 is working.
- Because there are more fish, anglers are catching them faster, landing fish at three times the rate they did in 2007. The fish are also twice the size on average as before.
- To maintain and build on the progress made, NOAA Fisheries must shorten the recreational season to keep fishermen within their catch limit.

What is the status of the new red snapper assessment?

- The new assessment will be completed this May and presented to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in June.
- The goal is to extend or supplement the 2013 season length if supported by the assessment results.
- For more information on the assessment, please visit http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=31.

What other red snapper regulations are fishery managers considering?

- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is exploring a number of alternative management options, including:
 - A regional management strategy that would delegate some aspects of decision making to the Gulf coast states to provide greater flexibility at the local level while still meeting overall conservation objectives;
 - Reallocating all or some portion of future catch limit increases between the commercial and recreational sectors (the current allocation is 51% commercial and 49% recreational);
 - A days-at-sea program for the for-hire sector;
 - An intersector trading program; and
 - A fish tag program.

Where can I find more information on the red snapper fishery?

- For more information on *Red Snapper, Past, Present and Future*, please visit http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/red_snapper/.